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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

**INFORMATION REPORT**

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SUBJECT Military Geography of Hainan

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SOURCE

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2. The area around Hoihow is low and sandy, and back away from the coast it becomes rolling. The interior of the island is mountainous. I have never traveled along the west coast of the island but I understand that there the mountains are very close to the water.

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3. I do not know the official elevation of Hoihow, but it must be right at sea level. Our compound in Hoihow was very close to the waterfront, and during very high tides the water would sometimes come up to the hospital steps. Out along the coast outside of Hoihow there is a bluff 40 or 60 feet high. The highest points in this whole district are two volcanic craters which are called the saddle mountains. They are several miles southwest of Hoihow. I do not know the elevations of the craters.

4. Along the crest in the Hoihow area the earth is sandy. Up on the bluff and back up from the bluff the earth is red and somewhat clayey. As you get away from the coast there are outcroppings of rock (lava) and eventually it gets quite rocky.

5. Around Hoihow the earth is not marshy after rains as the water drains off fairly well. There are rice fields around Hoihow where the water is retained, but even at that the earth does not seem marshy.

6. The three rivers of any importance on Hainan are the Golden, Kachek and Sanghoe Rivers. The mouth of the Golden River is near Hoihow. There are other small rivers and streams on the island, but none of them are as long or as wide as the three major ones. The rivers have cut channels into the surface of the land and it is sometimes difficult to see them from a distance. During the rainy season, however, the water usually spreads out over the banks of the rivers and can easily be seen. This is particularly true of the Golden River. Some of the smaller streams get very low during the dry season, but there is always water in the three larger rivers. There is quite a lot of river boat traffic on the Golden River, and the Kachek River has been used for floating logs down out of the mountains.

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7. Most of the area along the coast in the Hoihow region is cultivated. Rice, (two rice crops per year) millet, and sugar cane are the main crops. Up from the coast, around Limko, sugar cane and indigo are grown. Some cotton is also grown, but there is very little. Up away from the coast there is grazing land, some of which is vacant. Some of the land on the upland plains could be used for dry farming, in fact, when we saw quite a few pieces of heavy farming equipment in Hoihow [redacted] /see 00-B / we thought perhaps it was to be used for dry farming in this area. Much of the land in the upland plains shows evidences of having been farmed at one time as it is terraced, but it has now gone back to grass. It has not been under cultivation [redacted]

8. In the lava rock area nearly all the fields are surrounded by stone walls. Where there are no walls many of the fields are surrounded by cactus and Pandanus (wild pineapple). Pandanus has sharp edges and lots of thorns and it makes a good hedge. It could make an impenetrable hedge. Rice fields are not enclosed -- the fields are separated by paths. During the winter many of the rice fields are practically dry and it would be possible to walk through them.

9. There are no actual irrigation canals that I know of on Hainan but there are a number of drainage ditches here and there.

10. The population of Hainan has been estimated at about two million, and I do not know the population of Hoihow, but there are many people in that area. There has been quite an influx of people into Hainan since the Communists took over. Many northern soldiers have come in -- [redacted] estimated that 100 thousand soldiers had come into Hainan, but I do not know on what he based this. I have seen as many as one thousand troops march by at a time in Hoihow. In addition to the soldiers who have come in many Chinese have returned to Hainan from the south seas. I could not estimate the number of civilians who have returned.

11. I have never been into the mountainous interior of Hainan, but I have been in the "foothill" areas. I cannot give any elevations, but the slopes in the foothills are generally gentle, and they are rounded for the most part. Some of the mountains I have seen from Nodoo, in northwestern Hainan, are sharp. Some are covered with forests and some with grass. Some of the foothills are wild land. I doubt whether there are any cattle running wild in the hills as they do in the US. As far as I know there are no roads through the hills, but I believe there are trails. People in this area live in villages and not on individual farms. Most of the villages are small. The aboriginal Miao people live on the mountain sides, probably in villages, and the Loi tribes live in the valleys.

12. I have no details on the elevations or degrees of slope, etc, of the mountains on Hainan. Most of the mountains are tree covered. On the eastern side of the island where the Miao tribes are found some of the mountains are covered with tall grass (shoulder-high or higher) which is used extensively in making thatched roofs.

13. I have not heard whether the Communists have done any logging in the mountains, but before they came in small-scale logging operations were carried on. The logs were cut in the mountains and floated down the rivers to the coast. Most of the wood in the forests of Hainan is hardwood.

14. I know of no snow in the mountains on Hainan. I understand that on the mountains the temperature gets down to the freezing point occasionally during the winter, but on the plains the temperature rarely goes below 40°. In Kachak the temperature went down to 35° one day in 1942, but that was extreme.

15. As far as I know the transportation routes in the mountains consist of trails only, and I doubt whether there are any tunnels.

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16. The main vegetation in the Hoihow area is cultivated crops -- rice primarily.
17. The trees on Hainan do not have a chance to grow very tall because they are cut down for firewood. (Fuel is a tremendous problem for the Hainanese people). Most of the trees are green the greater part of the year, and very few of them lose their leaves. Wherever there is a village on Hainan there are trees, particularly around temples and schools. The trees around these public places are less likely to be cut down for firewood, but other trees are frequently cut down for this purpose. There are scrub bamboo thickets along the edges of fields or villages, or on elevations in the middle of fields, etc. These trees grow in clumps. The Hainanese rarely cut green bamboo, but they wait until the bamboo dies and then cut it. The first branches of the trees on Hainan are usually fairly high, but they vary. The only conifers I saw on the island were some pine trees toward the interior. Their branches were quite high (the lower one had presumably been cut for firewood).
18. The grass on Hainan is high only in the mountains. In the uplands it is ankle-high or knee-high.
19. There may be areas of jungle growth in the mountains which are so dense that they would be difficult to get through, and I believe it would be difficult for anyone to get through patches of scrub bamboo and wild pineapple in the lower areas. These trees (scrub bamboo and wild pineapple) grow along river banks, on road banks, along ridges, etc.
20. It would be difficult for anyone to hide in the mountain vegetation but it would probably be possible to hide for short periods of time in hedges of wild pineapple and scrub bamboo in the lower areas. It would be difficult to get through them, and if one stayed in them for very long they would be found out by dogs, hogs, and other animals.
21. The main rivers on Hainan are quite deep, but a typical depth for the smaller rivers and tributaries would be about eight or ten feet. I doubt whether many of the tributaries are much more than 30 feet wide. It is necessary to have either bridges or ferries to cross most of the rivers and streams. Most of the bridges are wooden. The streams are fairly rapid, but they are not so swift that one could not wade through them (when they are low). Up in the mountains where the streams are shallow it would be possible to wade across.
22. Most of the stream banks are sloping on one side and fairly steep on the other -- a condition which apparently has resulted from the currents and the beds in the streams. There are small islands or sand bars which appear in many of the streams when they are low, but they disappear during high water periods. During the dry season the water goes down very markedly. It gets so low during this period that it might be possible to ford some of the streams, but in most cases this would not be necessary since there are bridges across them.
23. I know of no lakes on Hainan Island. There are small ponds here and there, but to my knowledge there are no lakes.
24. The water in the streams is probably not safe to drink, because most of the streams are used as sewers. If one were right at the source of the stream it would probably be safe to drink the water, however. As far as I know the water in the streams is not contaminated in such a way that it is harmful when it comes in contact with the human body.
25. Hainan has a subtropical climate. I do not know what the total rainfall is per year, but there are showers in June which increase in intensity until September or October when there are real downpours. The rains are usually over by the end of October. There are occasional typhoons in November, but as a rule November is a very pleasant month. There is a misty drizzle in January and February which often lasts for several days at a time. A considerable amount of moisture falls during these months -- more than one realizes. In April and May there frequently is no rainfall at all. During these months the grass gets brown and there is dust in the air.

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26. The sky over Hainan is usually clear, except during January and February. I have known times when the sun has not been seen for six weeks during these months, but this is unusual.
27. Except for the winter months the winds in the Hoihow area are south, southeasterly or southwesterly, more or less constantly. During the winter there are cold north and northwest winds. The air around Hoihow is too moist to have much dust, and there is rarely so much that the whole atmosphere is hazy.
28. There is never any snow in the Hoihow area, nor anywhere on Hainan that I know of. During the winter there is often a misty rain, but there is hardly ever a general fog. When the fog does come it is sort of a ground fog and it is difficult to see through it. It usually burns off by afternoon in the Hoihow area. Visibility in the misty rain is fair.
29. The average temperature in the Hoihow area is about 50°F during the winter. It does go down to 40° or 45° for a day or two, but it rarely gets lower. In the summer it goes to about 100° occasionally, but the average summer temperature is 80° to 85°. There is usually a breeze, however, so the heat is not unbearable. The rivers and streams do not freeze during the winter. Things get frosted occasionally, but nothing ever actually freezes.
30. I have never heard of a landslide on Hainan, and there are no active volcanoes there. There are no real earthquakes, although there are occasional tremors. During the 23 years I spent on Hainan I remember only three tremors, and they were at different seasons of the year.
31. I know of no military action which has taken place on Hainan since the Communists took over.

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